

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

RECEIVED

CHRISTOPHER MILNER, individually
and on behalf of all others similarly
situated,

Plaintiff,

-against-

CHAMBLESS MATH & CARR, P.C.,

Defendant.

Civil Case Number: 2:18-cv-700

DEBRA R. HACKETT, CLK
U.S. DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT ALA

CIVIL ACTION

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT
AND
DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff CHRISTOPHER MILNER (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), an Alabama resident, brings this class action complaint by and through the undersigned attorneys, against Defendant CHAMBLESS MATH & CARR, P.C. (hereinafter "Defendant"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the FDCPA in 1977 in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a). At that time, Congress was concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* Congress concluded that "existing laws . . . [we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).
2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to "insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using

abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged.” *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate, *id.* § 1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action under 28 U.S.C. § 1331, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.* and 28 U.S.C. § 2201. If applicable, the Court also has pendent jurisdiction over the state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).
4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2).

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Alabama consumers seeking redress for Defendant’s actions of using false, deceptive and misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of an alleged debt.
6. Defendant's actions violated § 1692 *et seq.* of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act (“FDCPA”) which prohibits debt collectors from engaging in false, deceptive or misleading practices.
7. Plaintiff is seeking damages, and declaratory and injunctive relief.

PARTIES

8. Plaintiff is a natural person and a resident of the State of Alabama, and is a “Consumer” as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692(a)(3).
9. Defendant is a collection agency with its registered office located at 5720 Carmichael Road, Montgomery, Alabama 36117.
10. Upon information and belief, Defendant is a company that uses the mail, telephone, or facsimile in a business the principal purpose of which is the collection of debts, or that regularly collects or attempts to collect debts alleged to be due another.
11. Defendant is a “debt collector,” as defined under the FDCPA under 15 U.S.C. §

1692a(6).

ALLEGATIONS OF FACT

12. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
13. Some time prior to November 30, 2017, an obligation was allegedly incurred to THE HEALTH CARE AUTHORITY FOR BAPTIST HEALTH dba BAPTIST EAST (hereinafter "BAPTIST EAST").
14. The BAPTIST EAST obligation arose out of a residential rent transaction in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes.
15. The alleged BAPTIST EAST obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).
16. BAPTIST EAST is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(4).
17. Defendant contends that the BAPTIST EAST debt is past due.
18. Defendant is a company that uses mail, telephone or facsimile in a business the principal purpose of which is the collection of debts, or that regularly collects or attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors.
19. BAPTIST EAST directly or through an intermediary contracted the Defendant to collect the alleged debt.
20. On or about November 30, 2017, the Defendant caused to be delivered to the Plaintiff a collection letter in an attempt to collect the alleged BAPTIST EAST debt. **See Exhibit A.**
21. Upon information and belief, the November 30, 2017 letter was the first communication between the Defendant and Plaintiff regarding the BAPTIST EAST debt.
22. The November 30, 2017 letter was sent or caused to be sent by persons employed by

Defendant as a “debt collector” as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(6).

23. The November 30, 2017 letter is a “communication” as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(2).

24. The Plaintiff received and read the Letter.

25. The Letter stated in part:

“Principal Balance: \$20.00”

26. The Letter further stated:

“In addition to that amount, you may be responsible for additional interest, fees, and/or costs of collection if you signed the consent to treatment form, or if Alabama law provides for such charges. Because of interest, late charges, and other charges that may vary from day to day, the amount due on the day you pay may be greater than the amount stated in this letter.”

27. Upon information and belief, additional interest, late charges or other charges were not accruing from day to day.

28. Upon information and belief, there existed no costs of collection on this account that would be added to the alleged balance.

29. The Plaintiff, as would any least sophisticated consumer read the above statement and believed that the Defendant could potentially impose additional charges, even though that would never actually incur. *See e.g., Beauchamp v. Fin. Recovery Servs., Inc.*, No. 10 CIV. 4864 SAS, 2011 WL 891320, at *3 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 14, 2011) (finding that a letter stating that the debt balance may increase could mislead the least sophisticated debtor into believing that additional charges or interest would accrue).

30. By inputting this language, the Defendant caused the Plaintiff a real risk of harm.

Plaintiff, as would the least sophisticated consumer, would believe that they have

a financial incentive to pay this debt sooner, or risk owing a higher amount.

31. Defendants could have taken the steps necessary to bring its actions within compliance with the FDCPA, but neglected to do so and failed to adequately review its actions to ensure compliance with the law.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

32. Plaintiff brings claims, pursuant to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (hereinafter “FRCP”) Rule 23, individually and on behalf of the following consumer class.
33. The Class consists of: a) All consumers with addresses in the State of Alabama b) who were sent a collection letter from the Defendant c) attempting to collect a consumer debt owed to BAPTIST EAST, d) that states “In addition to that amount, you may be responsible for additional interest, fees, and/or costs of collection” and/or “Because of interest, late charges, and other charges that may vary from day to day, the amount due on the day you pay may be greater than the amount stated in this letter” (e) when no such charges were accruing (f) which letter was sent on or after a date one year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date 21 days after the filing of this action.
34. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.
35. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendant and all officers, members, partners, managers, directors, and employees of the Defendant and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action and all members of their immediate families.
36. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The

principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as ***Exhibit A***, violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and 1692g.

37. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories.

38. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

39. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- (a) **Numerosity:** The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- (b) **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as ***Exhibit A***, violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and 1692g.
- (c) **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendant's common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- (d) **Adequacy:** The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are averse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter.

Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

- (e) **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

40. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.
41. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

COUNT I

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e *et seq.*

42. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
43. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

44. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, misleading and/or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt or to obtain information concerning a consumer.
45. The Defendant violated said section in its letter to the Plaintiff by:
- a. Using a false, deceptive, and misleading representations or means in connection with the collection of a debt;
 - b. Falsely representing the amount of the alleged debt in violation of 1692e(2)(A);
 - c. Making a false representation or using deceptive means to collect a debt in violation of 1692e(10).
46. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e *et seq.* of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692g *et seq.*

47. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
48. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.
49. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g, a debt collector must within five days of the initial communication notify the consumer of his or her validation rights.
50. The Defendant violated said section in its letter to the Plaintiff by failing to accurately state the amount of the debt in violation of 1692g(a)(1).

51. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g *et seq.* of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY.


52. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby request a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

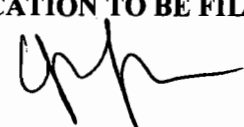
PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant as follows:

- (a) Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative and Plaintiff's Counsel, as Class Counsel;
- (b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- (c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
- (d) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
- (e) Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
- (f) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: July 26, 2018

By: /s/ David I. Schoen 
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